

Deliberate Toddler Adoption

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In Chapter 2, *Is Toddler Adoption for You?*, Mary writes,

I suspect it is safe to say that few of us who adopted toddlers woke up one day with a clear vision that toddler adoption was our golden route to parenthood. Nor was toddler adoption the first option most of us considered. For this reason, time taken to work through an adoption plan is time well-taken. People who choose to parent because they want to satisfy a need to nurture another human life are likely to be well-equipped for parenting by any route. People who can envision themselves creating a nurturing environment for any child, should consider whether they could create that special environment for a toddler-age child.

People may have very different motivations for adopting a toddler. The best case scenario, I believe, is the “deliberate toddler adoption”—one in which the decision to adopt a toddler is the result of a careful refining process. First, parenting through adoption is carefully considered; then, adoption of children with special needs is contemplated, and finally, adoption of a toddler is consciously chosen as the preferred plan of action. So, step-by-step, this plan may include,

- Personal reflection about adoption’s losses and your feelings about them.
- Sharing your discoveries about yourself with your partner.
- Discussing ways to blend your separate needs and wishes in order to select a consensus or compromise course of action.
- Gathering information about the options you find of interest.
- Inventorying personal resources—time, money, emotional energy and physical capacity.

1 Arleta James, PCC, ABC of Ohio, 440-230-1960, arletajames@gmail.com, www.arletajames.com, *Welcoming a Brother or Sister by Adoption: From Navigating New Relationships to Building a Loving Family* (Jessica-Kinsley Publishers - <http://www.jkp.com/>, 2013)

- Building a detailed plan for pursuing that course of action—developing strategies, assigning tasks.
- Pursuing the course of action.
- Evaluating and adjusting the plan as needed.

Families may decide deliberately to adopt a toddler for a variety of reasons, including anticipated life style, their own ages when they begin parenting, personalities and preferences, belief systems, age range of children already in the family, previous experience with children, and observation of others who have succeeded, to name but a few. People who are happy with their choice to adopt a toddler view parenting as a privilege rather than a right, and see toddlers filled with potential.

Unfortunately there are some people whose reasons for choosing toddler adoption are misguided from the start. Primary among these are those who are motivated by a pity or a sense of duty, neither of which is healthy for the child or the parents. That is, some choose toddler adoption for self-righteous reasons, not because they were committed to their children's needs. There are other misguided motivations for choosing to adopt a toddler. For example,

- “Toddlers won’t involve all that ‘messy stuff’ associated with the care of infants, such as making formula and changing diapers.” The reality is that toddlers are masters of their own special messes. Their toileting accidents are bigger, they have a penchant for emptying cupboards and coloring on walls, and they can decorate the entire kitchen with thrown food!
- “We’ll get to skip the part about getting up in the middle of the night.” The adjustment of toddlers to their new surroundings and families often requires as much night-parenting as day-parenting.
- We are adopting a “big infant.” Prospective parents may be motivated to deny the differences associated with toddlers if they really have their hearts set on an infant but believe that they are unable to do so for one reason or another. Or, this belief can occur as a result of “toddler adoption by default.” This occurs when parents receive an infant referral, but so much time elapses between the referral and the placement that the child is a toddler by the time he arrives home. There can be strong disappointment that the infant who had been referred to them was gone, and in her place was a toddler with a very distinct personality and unique set of needs. I call this “time-warping” the child; continuing to envision the child at the age at which they were initially referred, rather than adjusting to the vision to match the developing child.

In conclusion, parents who believe in their heart and minds that toddler adoption is somehow inferior to infant adoption or having a child by birth will want to consider a different route to parenting. A very satisfied new adoptive toddler mom cautioned, “Don’t adopt a toddler as a concession because you can’t get any other child. Spend time with toddlers and let yourself fall in love with that stage of development.” Then, go adopt a toddler and enjoy every moment with the child you so desired to nurture from this age and on!